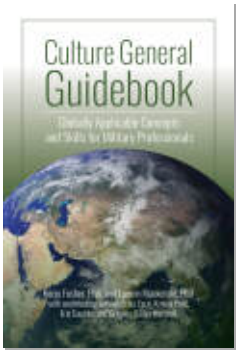
CHAPTER 3 Culture General Skills



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CHAPTER 3

Culture General Skills

In this chapter, we discuss various culture general skills that you can employ to shape your thinking and improve your intercultural interactions. You use culture general skills every day as you interpret your environment and interact within it. You may not realize you are using these skills, or you may need to be more aware of how to adapt them to different cultural contexts; however, they are applicable to all environments at home and abroad, just like the concepts for understanding human behavior from the previous chapter.

This chapter begins with a review of skills for *thinking*, which include observation, suspending judgment, self-regulation, and perspective-taking. The focus then shifts to the intercultural communication skills for *interacting*, which include leveraging communication styles, employing effective interaction skills, active and appreciative listening, managing paralanguage use and perception, and decoding nonverbal messages. The chapter concludes with applications: building rapport, identifying and managing culture shock, and working with an interpreter. The intent is to make these skills more transparent and accessible to ensure you understand how they can help you do your job more effectively.[1]

[1] This reference cannot capture every cultural skill, as there are too many. The authors have selected those that military personnel have found to be the most helpful and relevant. Others, such as negotiating space and identity and managing ambiguity, are important, as are the individual characteristics that contribute to cross-cultural competence (e.g., flexibility, adaptability, openness, curiosity, intrinsic motivation, etc.); however, they will not be covered here due to resource and space constraints. The authors welcome follow-on work to broaden the materials presented in this work.

Observation

Discussion

As a military professional, you have been taught the skill of observation, for example, how to identify communication infrastructure, transportation arteries, enemy positions, etc. in your operating environments to gain situational awareness and plan your missions. Additionally, in your everyday life, you also routinely observe others' behaviors to adapt yours to the situation. You gain insights about your surroundings based on your observations of the activities, people, and places around you. You make decisions and take actions every day based on your interpretation of all this information.

You often do not realize you are doing this, as the process is so routine. When facing the unknown, however, you must employ the same skills and techniques to make sense out of what you are experiencing. Observation is a conscious activity that requires you to slow down, look closely, and question each element of a scene. It is an intentional process. Knowing what to look for and how to interpret what you are looking at are key components of observation, which can be challenging in new or evolving situations. As culture groups shape their physical space, each operating environment or situation is as unique as the groups present. Being able to discern the components of a cultural landscape and understand the behavior of those within it requires well-honed observation skills.

As military personnel, you are routinely sent into unfamiliar situations with unfamiliar landscapes and people and asked to make sense of what is going on. When in such a situation, remember the following four questions to help you gain a more accurate assessment of what is happening around you.

1. **What can I see/hear/smell/touch?** To answer this question, you are directly observing your environment using all your senses.

Look systematically at what is going on around you and consciously take in the details. Think about the various sounds and smells that are present. Consider what is not present. For example, you might notice that no one wears watches, that you can hear yelling, or that certain people are dressed all in black. These observations might turn out to be meaningful when combined with other information. But if you do not deliberately notice and remember it, the information will simply be lost.

2. **What is the wider context (place and time)?**
   a. Where are you? (Immediate vicinity, e.g., on the street or in a market, specific town, region of a nation, country, region of the world, etc.)
   b. What time is it? (Time of day, day of week, month, season, culturally significant time, e.g., religious holiday, etc.)
3. **What do your observations in context tell you?** What can you infer from the information you have? Given that you are in a particular place at a particular time observing very specific details, can you make sense of what you are seeing?
4. **How can you be sure?** You need to validate your interpretation and confirm your understanding of what you are experiencing. Have you seen the same thing in a similar context several times? Can you identify a pattern? Does what you are experiencing seem to be normal for the area or not? If necessary, ask someone to help you interpret what you think you are experiencing.

These observational skills can be used in a wide variety of intercultural contexts. They can be tested anywhere from the commissary to an overseas assignment. When in an area where you are unfamiliar with the people, their language, the way they live, or what they believe, you can still establish a solid understanding of your area and the people within it to inform your plans and actions through observation. For example,

observation can teach you something about appropriate greetings and gestures, who to talk to, and perhaps who to avoid as well as what kinds of information you might be able to obtain from someone. If you stop for a few minutes and actively observe what is going on around you, you will be surprised by how much you notice and can figure out. Use the steps described above to answer the following questions: Who is there? Are there different culture groups or people from different sectors of the population? Do they dress or behave differently? What are they doing and with whom? Are they in a hurry? Are they actually shopping or just hanging out, walking, or browsing? Who is not there? What is not there? Why?

When in a new or evolving environment, you are likely to go through this sort of observational process several times a day. Over time, you may be able to distinguish between what is normal or usual (the baseline) for an area or group of people and what is out of the ordinary and then incorporate this into your planning. In certain military communities, you may hear people refer to this baseline as the *pattern of life*.

Key Points

Interpreting the Cultural Landscape

Observation is a key component of interpreting the cultural landscape, which is vital to gaining situational awareness in an unfamiliar environment or one in which the situation is fluid, rendering the available information outdated or inaccurate. The cultural landscape is the original physical environment of an area as adapted and interpreted by the people who live there. It is human-made and dynamic, created by the constant shaping of the physical environment by humans. Everything created by humans is part of the cultural landscape, such as buildings, roads, farms, dams, etc., as are natural features that have special meaning to people, like a sacred mountain or a river that forms a boundary. People are reflected—often unintentionally—in their ordinary, daily landscapes.

Landscape interpretation can reveal significant insights into how specific culture groups display the culture general concepts discussed in the previous chapter and, thus, help you better understand their behavior.

Every element in a cultural landscape offers clues about the people in it; however, these elements cannot be looked at in isolation but rather need to be interpreted holistically within their wider spatial, temporal, cultural, and environmental contexts. Landscapes represent significant investments of money, time, and emotions and often carry symbolic or sacred value. The mundane often is more revealing than the spectacular, especially when it comes to identifying culture groups, localized economies, social networks, and impacts of local security and development efforts. People will not change their landscapes without good reasons. Therefore, changes in ordinary features of a cultural landscape can signal important shifts that need to be recognized and understood. Also, differences in the landscape usually equate with differences in various cultural aspects between or within the culture groups present. With this understanding and using keen observation skills, you can more accurately interpret the unknown cultural landscapes you encounter.

Common Pitfalls

There are three common pitfalls that people step into when using the skill of observation. The first is *mirror-imaging*. Mirror-imaging is interpreting what you see through the lens of your own cultural background and experience. While natural and very common, this, obviously, can lead to inaccurate assumptions about what you are experiencing. Instead, put your observations into the context of the place you are in and the people you are with. For example, do not automatically assume that a common gesture in the United States, such as a nod, means yes everywhere else. In some places, such as Bulgaria, a similar gesture actually means no. Before jumping to conclusions about significance, observe the scene as a whole, go through the four questions above, and consider what the

Remember Rule #2: Things you take for granted may not be true here.

gestures you observe seem to be achieving or leading to. As another example, in the Middle East, it is very common to see men holdings hands. Mirror-imaging might lead you to assume that these men are romantically involved. In contrast, active observation should make you question whether this is really the case—given the frequency with which you see it and the cultural environment—and then encourage you to go and gather more information before choosing a course of action. This holds true for physical structures and natural objects as well. For example, a fence or a wall can mean different things depending on how the culture group interacts with it, as can a mountain or a pile of rocks.

The second pitfall is *looking without seeing*. Military personnel on deployment can be especially busy and focused on their mission. In such circumstances, you might look right at a landscape without registering important aspects of the scene. You would likely notice the spectacular or dramatic, but you might miss the ordinary, everyday aspects of the landscape. Beyond missing out on that knowledge, you also may miss revealing local changes.

The third pitfall actually occurs in familiar environments and is referred to as *adaptation*. How many times have you said, "I have been through here 100 times and never noticed that sign"? When in familiar territory, people tend to ignore visual information that they see frequently because they are used to seeing it and have long ago figured out and filed away (internalized) a cultural understanding of its meaning(s). They tend to overlook common details and not think about things that are in clear sight. If you have adapted to your environment, one of these details could change in important ways, and you would not notice. When moving through a very familiar landscape, you should make a special effort to

Foot Patrols in New Environments

Foot patrols are a good opportunity for military personnel to practice observation skills. When new to an area, there is a lot to observe, and it may be difficult to know what information to prioritize. This was true for one Marine sergeant during a field training exercise. Their patrol had completed its objective and was headed back to base as the sun was setting. Just then, a lance corporal at the end of the formation spotted an arrangement of stones and sticks that seemed out of place. The lance corporal called this out to the sergeant, but they pressed on. During the debrief session, the Marine evaluator explained that the sticks and rocks were a terrain model left by the enemy, and so it would have been better if the sergeant had paused the patrol long enough to capture or investigate what the lance corporal had observed.

The outcome was different for a newly arrived platoon in Helmand, Afghanistan. On their first patrol, a corporal noticed that a white substance occasionally appeared on the ground. It was not frost or easily recognizable to the corporal, so they stopped the patrol. Everyone waited as the message was sent forward to the interpreter at the front of the formation as they doubled back to talk to the corporal. The Afghan interpreter and security forces on patrol all agreed that this substance was common. In fact, the white substance was salt, which sometimes accumulates when crops are poorly irrigated. The corporal learned something new about the terrain. As was stated earlier, observation is a conscious activity that requires you to slow down, look closely, and question each element of a scene. Sometimes, it is difficult to balance the needs of the mission with the time it takes to observe and investigate. However, the investment of time on the front end can make the mission easier to accomplish in the long run, especially in intercultural contexts.[1]

[1] Vignette drawn from personal experience of contributing author Kristin Post in 2010. Training exercise observed aboard Camp Pendleton in August 2011, as part of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning's Longitudinal Study of Impact of Culture Training Products, deemed to be not human subjects research by an Institutional Review Board Applicability Review, dated 31 March 2011.

actively observe and look for anything that is new or unexpected. It could hold a clue to some important local change. Both looking without seeing and adaptation involve being blind to what is actually present. Observation requires a fully present mind and intentional focus when approaching your environment.

Suspending Judgment

Discussion

It is common to rush to judgment when confronted with a situation or a behavior that confuses you or challenges your sense of right and wrong. This can happen, for example, when reading a news story, meeting someone new, or traveling to an unfamiliar place. Individuals rely on their own understanding, cultural background, and experiences to interpret the experiences and actions of others. In other words, people fall into mirror-imaging. One skill to help mitigate that tendency is to suspend judgment. Suspending judgment is taking a step back and *temporarily* suspending your own beliefs, assumptions, and expectations to assess the situation neutrally and try to understand what is going on.

The purpose of suspending judgment is to ensure that your personal likes and dislikes, your sense of right and wrong, and your idea of what is logical or illogical do not get in the way of understanding what is happening and why. Without being clouded by your preconceptions, you are more able to integrate your understanding of the cultural context at play into your thinking and arrive at a more accurate assessment of the situation.

For example, in conducting a theater security cooperation exercise, you may witness foreign military officers treating their enlisted members in ways you deem completely inappropriate, for example, more like servants than colleagues. However, to react and express disapproval based on your own military norms may invite resentment and be counterpro-

Too Much Training

When it comes to values such as honesty, it is difficult to suspend judgment. But if you feel someone is being dishonest, that is an ideal time to step back and assess the situation. One Marine found out how beneficial this was when they conducted a security forces training mission in a Middle Eastern country. They were eager to help the security forces learn land navigation and set up the practical application to test their knowledge. The Marine soon realized some of the partner nation soldiers were copying other people's answers. They were frustrated and were tempted to think these soldiers were both lazy and dishonest. When the Marine talked to the interpreter about it, they realized that the soldiers had been listening to the same land navigation training for 18 months. Their team was just one of many that jumped into the mission without first discovering what the partner nation forces knew or what they wanted to learn. When the Marine thought about this from their perspective, they knew they would be bored if they had been in School of Infantry for one and a half years. The Marine reported the incorrect answers and possibility of cheating to the partner nation platoon commander, but because they understood the soldiers' actions in context, they were no longer frustrated.[1]

[1] Vignette based on notes from an interview with a sergeant, 1 October 2016, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning's Longitudinal Assessment Project, under USMC IRB Protocol USMC.2016.0005.

ductive to completing the mission. Different militaries have different cultures, and what is acceptable and normal to one may be unacceptable to another. Keeping in mind that they are doing what makes sense to them, it is better to step back and think about why they behave this way and how you can work within this framework to best complete the mission, provided that you can do so within your unit's legal constraints.

As another example, you may find that your counterpart's approaches to training are very different from what you have experienced in your military training. For instance, in your eyes they may place undue emphasis on sporting activities, such as soccer, at the expense of weapons or

skills training. However, if, instead of reacting to this seeming waste of time, you step back for a moment and think about the purpose of your mission, is there really a problem? Ultimately, you are not just trying to build skills; you are also trying to build lasting relationships with foreign partners. Therefore, even if you feel that playing soccer will slow down the mission, it might help build connections that will be beneficial in the long term.

Suspending judgment is a useful tool in a multitude of situations, such as in the field, at a desk drafting an intelligence report based on varied sources, or at an interagency planning session. It is an internal check to ensure you do not jump to conclusions before objective consideration of the situation at hand.

Self-regulation

Discussion

The following description of self-regulation underscores the importance of this fundamental life skill.

> Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and control our own behavior, emotions, or thoughts, altering them in accordance with the demands of the situation. It includes the abilities to inhibit first responses, to resist interference from irrelevant stimulation, and to persist on relevant tasks even when we don't enjoy them.[2]

Self-regulation is a skill that humans develop in early childhood to varying degrees. In the military, this is referred to as maintaining tact and bearing. This is something that you do many times throughout the day. Most often, you are not even aware that you are doing this, as it has been inte-

[2] Joan L. Cook and Greg Cook, *Child Development: Principles and Perspectives*, 2d ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009), 352–55.

Remember Rule #3: You do not have to like it to understand it.

grated into your daily life. However, it is a critical skill for military personnel across the range of military occupational fields. As an example, a 2009 Army Research Institute study surveying 565 Army and Marine advisors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan reported that, of all the skills the advisors noted as being most critical to their cross-cultural effectiveness, impression management rated highest, and being able to manage your impressions requires you to be able to control and adjust your thoughts, behavior, and emotions effectively.[3] It is a skill you can sharpen by recognizing you do this (making the skill explicit), through understanding what it involves, and by intentional practice. It requires you to be constantly aware of how you are feeling, to pause before acting, to maintain focus on the task, and to adapt your response as necessary to advance your mission/goal.

Here is an example of how this can play out. While training a partner force, you recognize (monitor) that you are feeling angry in response to seeing that the members of the partner force behave very differently from what you are used to in a way that goes against your sense of right and wrong. Your first response may be to express your anger or yell at them. However, if the people you are training see you visibly upset, angry, or even surprised, it may challenge your ability to interact, build rapport, and ultimately complete your mission. Instead, it may prove more effective to inhibit your first response (anger), remain focused on your task (persist), and adapt your response (control) to be able to sustain the

[3] Michelle R. Zbylut et al., *The Human Dimension of Advising: An Analysis of Interpersonal, Linguistic, Cultural, and Advisory Aspects of the Advisor Role*, Technical Report 1248 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2009), 39, 89–93.

Cultural Variation in the Display of Emotion

How groups talk about emotion and express it varies. We learn from a young age what kinds of nonverbal actions to display for the range of emotions humans experience and who should display them (for example, do you laugh when you are embarrassed, when you are nervous, when you are happy, none of the above, or all of the above?). Understanding that there are cultural differences in expectations surrounding the expression of emotion helps you avoid mirror-imaging and prompts you to solicit that kind of information before you engage with others. Such information also helps you collect clues about underlying attitudes and values.

training and maintain rapport. What this means in practice is that you should pay close attention to what you say and how you say it as well as to your body language, remaining aware of the ways in which your behavior might be interpreted. Be aware of other people's body language and how they respond to you, as well, and adapt as necessary. You can integrate the two skills previously discussed (observation and suspending judgment) into this process as well. The goal is for the intentions behind your behavior to align with its interpretation. Of course, there will be times when an emotional response is the appropriate one. What you choose to display will depend on the specific situation. By understanding when you are actually employing this skill and making your response an explicit (versus implicit) process of discernment, you are better able to control the outcome by adapting yourself to the needs of the situation. As a military professional, the goal is not to be transparent; it is to present an appropriate image of yourself for the situation at hand to advance your mission.

Chinese Foot-binding

Consider the creative way in which the skill of perspective-taking was used to challenge the practice of foot-binding. The practice involved binding young girls' feet tightly, deforming them in an attempt to create the impression of "golden lilies" that were four inches long. After enduring for nearly 100 years, the practice was ended because of, it is believed, a letter written by the Confucian scholar, Kang Youwei, asking the emperor to consider how other nations perceived the way China treated its women. Tradition holds that his letter convinced the emperor that nothing caused others to ridicule and look down on the Chinese more than foot-binding. This effective and creative use of perspective-taking brought about change for millions of women.[1]

[1] Vignette drawn from Kwame A. Appiah, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010).

Perspective-taking

Discussion

Perspective-taking is, quite simply, the ability to see things from another point of view. It is common to hear it described as putting yourself in someone else's shoes or walking a mile in them. Perspective-taking is often referred to as a foundational cultural skill simply because it begins the process of recognizing and articulating how a situation could appear from someone else's viewpoint. This recognition, in turn, sets the stage for a conversation that is open to alternative perspectives and finding common ground where it may not have been immediately obvious. Perspective-taking is viewed in contrast to ethnocentrism, in which a person is often locked into a single viewpoint and is unaware of associated limitations or that other viable views may exist.

This skill is useful when confronted with confusing or troubling information about a group or behavior. It is also useful when you are discerning how to shape your thinking, emotions, and behavior in response

to the presented situation. Have you ever read an article that explains a troubling practice and thought, "Why would they do that?" To be able to understand the reasons behind others' thinking, emotions, and behavior, you cannot rely solely on your own understanding of the world, as your cultural blinders could lead you to an inaccurate interpretation or design a flawed mission, destined to fail. Employing the skills of suspending judgment and maintaining tact and bearing provide you the cognitive and emotional space to incorporate the perspective of others into the interpretation of the presented situation. What this means in practice is that once you have resolved not to rush to judgment, and you have your emotions and body language in check, put yourself in the other person's or group's shoes and think about how they see the situation and what their priorities and constraints are. This will help you gain a more complete understanding of the situation and design more appropriate responses and actions.

For example, imagine that the temperature is more than 100 degrees and that you and your foreign counterparts are filling sandbags to use on the firing range. While your subordinates are toughing it out, your counterparts are complaining that they are being worked too hard and not getting enough breaks. From a U.S. military perspective, your initial response is to think they are weak and tell them so; their apparent laziness makes you annoyed, and it is difficult for you to maintain tact and bearing. However, when you take a moment to step back (maintain tact and bearing and suspend judgment) and think (cognitive space), you realize your counterparts have grown up in a different military culture than your own (consider another perspective). They are conscripts and not part of a professional military group, and they may not be used to this sort of intense work. Incorporating that knowledge into your thinking and planning in advance could accommodate these differences to minimize impact on mission. If discovered in process, by considering their perspective and the mission at hand, you are in a better position to find a viable solution to ensure mission accomplishment.

Intercultural Communication Skills

Discussion

The focus up to this point has been primarily devoted to culture general skills for thinking. This section discusses skills for interacting. *Intercultural communication* is a foundational culture general skill that helps you manage your interactions, anticipate misunderstanding in your interactions, and increase the likelihood of achieving your mission in culturally diverse environments. Communication is important because, as psychologists have been saying for years, if you have a good relationship with a person and something goes wrong (you missed a deadline!), that person tends to blame external forces (Major Jones has a lot to do right now). Whereas if you do not have a good relationship with that person and something goes wrong (you missed a deadline!), they will blame you (Major Jones is completely disorganized). We know that the quality of our relationships is connected to the quality of our communication. As our partnerships expand along with our mission sets, military professionals will be planning, partnering, and operating with and among people from all over the world and need to have effective intercultural communication (ICC) skills, in general, and interaction management skills, in particular. These ICC skills are defined as *actions* and *behaviors* that

- use *appropriate* and *effective* communication processes to successfully navigate an intercultural encounter, and
- are intentionally *repeatable* and *goal-directed* during interaction.

In other words, for communication to be competent, it must be both effective in its achievement of desired outcomes (shared meaning) and appropriate by meeting the expectations of the receiver and the situation. Why is this important? Consider the message the U.S. military sent with the following action: use of military working dogs in Iraq. Using military working dogs makes perfect sense to the U.S. military. Dogs are able to

detect explosives and narcotics where humans cannot and potentially keep their human handlers from harm. Unfortunately, dogs are considered unclean to Iraqis, and using them to search homes sent a message of disrespect. This had a negative impact on the mission. As always, context matters, and cultures vary. Aligning our communication through words, actions, and behaviors to account for the potential cultural triggers that may disrupt our mission helps us more effectively manage the interaction.

The other key words associated with ICC skills are *intentional*, *repeatable*, and *goal-directed*. This means, like our other intentional and goal-directed human behavior, we should have a plan or script. Similar to a film script, this gives us as actors an idea of what to expect as well as some suggested lines and movements. Preparation for communication is essential, and just as in Hollywood, ad-libbing and improvisation are integral parts of the production process. Through our own cultures, we learn common scripts for interaction that provide us with if-then guides for our own communication. An obvious military example is that, when a salute is rendered, there is an if-then script followed to return the salute. When greeting someone, if they extend their hand to us, then we typically offer our hand in return for a handshake. This seems simple. However, culture throws a wrench in these plans and presents unique challenges. Instead of cocommunicators following the same cultural script for interaction, it is often as if they are in two different films. What should you do if you extend your hand for a handshake and your colleague responds with a bow? This is where ICC skills come into play, allowing you to modify your communication to be more competent across a variety of cultures.

The following intercultural communication skills will enable you to better make sense of and prepare for both anticipated and unanticipated intercultural encounters.

1. Leveraging communication styles
2. Employing effective interaction management skills

Remember Rule #1: The local people have not organized themselves, their beliefs, or their behavior patterns for your convenience.

3. Practicing active listening
4. Managing paralanguage use and perception
5. Decoding nonverbal messages

This section will look closely at a variety of intercultural interactions that have caused misunderstanding and provide suggestions for using these skills to manage interaction outcomes. Employing such skills leads to greater communication *resourcefulness* that can benefit all interpersonal exchanges. The pages that follow provide brief *introductions and illustrations* of these skills and culture-specific examples intended to demonstrate the complex relationship between culture and communication in a particular military-relevant context.

Key Points

Skill 1: Leveraging Communication Styles

Sometimes "no" means "yes" and "yes" means "maybe." "Can you complete this by tomorrow?" Although it seems like a straightforward question, the way it is answered will depend largely on where in the world it is asked. Culturally variant approaches to giving a negative answer are good examples of how different communication styles manifest in our everyday interactions with others and how these styles frame how we interpret others' messages and how others interpret ours. In high-context cultures with a preference for indirect messaging, flexible words like *inshallah* (Arabic for if God wills) or *da nyet* (yes-no in Russian) can mean everything from a solid positive to a firm negative, requiring military per-

sonnel to read between the lines and seek out other clues to meaning.

Military members working with a variety of cultures have encountered numerous ways of saying "yes" and "no" as well as conflict due to instances of perceived deception. To individuals from cultures that value directness, the communication of well-meaning individuals from indirect cultures can seem like outright lies. In the guidebook *What Happens after the 3rd Cup of Tea?*, a scenario plays out in which a U.S. officer approaches an Afghan commander to plan troop movements.[4] This interaction sounds typical until you consider communication style. The U.S. captain asks the Afghan officer to lead the troops in front of his men. Due to the drive to preserve his face and safeguard the respect of his men, the Afghan commander cannot decline or intimate lack of readiness or willingness in front of his men and agrees to lead the convoy; he then backs out just before troop movements, requiring a last-minute mission reorganization. In cultures where reputations and respect are paramount, people structure their responses to avoid public disagreement or outcomes where face will be lost. This is an understood communication style in certain cultures. However, it is very difficult to understand when you have a different communication style.

Of course, communication style affects much more than just how to say yes and no in a particular culture and shapes such things as how to make a request, extend an apology, give a compliment, and even tell a joke. Communication style can be defined as "a pattern of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that comprises our preferred ways of giving and receiving information in a specific situation."[5] One essential cross-cultural dimension of communication style is understanding the emphasis placed

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[4] Louise J. Rasmussen and Winston R. Sieck, *What Happens after the 3rd Cup of Tea?: A Cultural Sensemaking Guide to Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2010), 17.

[5] Dianne Hofner Saphiere, Barbara Kappler Mikk, and Basma Ibrahim DeVries, *Communication Highwire: Leveraging the Power of Diverse Communication Styles* (Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 2005), 5.

by those involved in the interaction on the actual words used and the cultural context in which those words are used. Edward Hall, in his original work, described cultures as on a continuum from high- to low-context based on the amount of information that is typically conveyed explicitly in verbal speech.[6]

High-context communicators privilege the cultural context in which words are spoken over the actual words and rely on indirect communication to convey meaning. There tends to be a lot of information essential to understanding the interaction that is conveyed indirectly whether nonverbally or through culturally shared knowledge. Cultures in Asia, Africa, and South America employ high-context communication patterns. Characteristics include collectivist values like self-effacement, preference for silence, use of spiral or circular arguments, and the use of communication as a social lubricant to help relationships run more smoothly. With high-context communication, the listener is responsible for appropriately interpreting the message.

Low-context communicators do the opposite, placing more emphasis on the actual words than on the cultural context and preferring direct communication (explicit words) to impart meaning. Low-context communication patterns can be found throughout Europe, North America, and Australia. Characteristics include individualist values like self-enhancement, preference for talk over silence, use of linear or direct argumentation, and an understanding that the primary function of communication is information. With low-context communication, the speaker is responsible for clearly communicating the message.

The concept of face, discussed earlier, is germane to the discussion of communication styles. It goes without saying that no one likes to be shamed or embarrassed. When communicating with others who

[6] Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 91.

employ the same or a similar communication style, it is relatively easy to avoid unnecessary or unintended loss of face, as you tend to know where to look for intended meaning. However, when low-context and high-context communicators interact, there is increased potential for misinterpretation of meaning on both sides as they value different sources of information during the interaction. This can lead to embarrassing or, worse, negative outcomes. Being mindful of style differences can help you interact more effectively and assist you in both the interpretation of others' messages and the creation of your own.

Skill 2: Employing Effective Interaction Management Skills

In January 1994, a simple handshake was the subject of great deliberation and discussion between two world leaders and U.S. President Bill Clinton. The occasion was the history-making accord between Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin. According to news reports, considerable discussion occurred over if, when, and how the two leaders should shake hands at the press announcement. Rabin was reticent, but Arafat was eager. Rabin reportedly agreed when Arafat assured him there would be no kissing of cheeks. Even then, via international television, the world witnessed as Arafat made the first move with his outstretched hand and Rabin exhibited momentary hesitation.[7]

Interaction management skills are the goal-oriented behaviors enact-

[7] Roger E. Axtell, *Gestures: The Do's and Taboos of Body Language Around the World*, 3d ed. (New York: Wiley, 1998), 17.

ed while communicating. The above excerpt is a reminder of how even something as quick and ordinary as a greeting has the potential to build up or break down a relationship. No matter where you are in the world, the greeting process entails a variety of interaction skills. It is well worth the effort to learn more about the interaction management skills that promote competent intercultural communication. Whether these skills are enacted effectively and appropriately is a matter of competence. The ways in which people communicate are strongly affected by cultural preferences for direct or indirect messaging as well as an orientation toward task or relational outcomes. Such skills as recognizing the cultural barriers to interaction and perception-checking help make conversations (and relationships) run more smoothly.

Some of the cultural barriers to interaction involve the variety of cultural differences associated with conversational topic management and information-gaining strategies. How do violations of communication behavior expectations affect the outcome of an interaction? There are culturally diverse ways of managing conversation topics and gaining information that can answer this question. As noted above, the communication patterns associated with individualist cultures tend to focus on the content (e.g., what exactly is being said) of a message in a conversation, whereas many communicators from collectivist cultures tend to focus more on the context (e.g., who is saying it, where they are saying it, etc.) of a message. In cross-cultural interaction, the individualism/collectivism dimensions influence how people approach topics in conversation. Here are some examples of the way conversational topic management can differ across cultures.

Collectively oriented culture groups

- organize topics in an interdependent fashion, keeping like topics close together
- use a significant amount of repetition

- complement verbal interaction with supporting nonverbal behaviors to further support a message
- consider the interaction implications for the relationship as more important than the actual topic
- employ harmonious, simultaneous talk in an effort to promote high connectivity

Individually oriented culture groups

- organize topics independent from one another
- show interest in the conversation through asking questions and making comments
- orient their attention to the explicit topic content
- perceive simultaneous talk as jarring and often leading to conflict[8]

While these are generalizations, they offer you insights into why it can be difficult to hold a conversation with a person from a different culture. Recognizing cultural barriers helps you overcome them. Instead of jumping to the conclusion that your counterpart is a bad conversationalist, you can seek alternative means to facilitate the interaction to achieve your desired outcome.

Along with differences in managing topics in conversations, information-gathering strategies can also vary across cultures and present a possible cultural barrier. Gaining information allows us to reduce the amount of uncertainty we have in an interaction. When we initiate an interaction with an unfamiliar person, we strategically plan our communication behaviors to reduce the level of uncertainty we have about communicating with them. The uncertainty-reduction process certainly happens in interaction with strangers, but it can also happen in any interaction, regardless of how well we know someone or how often we inter-

[8] William B. Gudykunst, *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004), 205.

act with them. There are three main strategies for information-gathering:

- **Passive strategies involve observation and taking mental notes.** Passive strategies allow you to reduce the amount of uncertainty in an interaction, but they do not involve any direct communication behaviors.
- **Active strategies involve actually asking questions of secondary sources, such as people intimately familiar with a culture or a particular person.** Looking for other sources of information, such as in a library or documentary, is also an active strategy.
- **Interactive strategies are those that directly involve interaction.** Two main strategies are direct questions and self-disclosure. These strategies require caution regarding the context of the interaction as well as how comfortable the person might be with direct questioning.

Cultural considerations infuse the information-gathering process, no matter the strategy employed, and can present barriers. Methods and subject matter that are appropriate in some cultures may not be in others. For example, it is inappropriate for an unrelated man to address a direct question to a Muslim woman in certain contexts. It may seem as though this is always the case, but what if that Muslim woman is a colleague at work at the Pentagon? Being able to recognize potential barriers and also keeping in mind, for example, variation and suspending judgment will help you to structure your actions appropriately for the context in which you find yourself.

Perception-checking is a useful skill that can help you address the potential complications that come with cultural differences in communication preferences and clarify and align intentions with interpretations during the communication process. It implies "I know I'm not qualified

Yes or No?

In most cultures, nodding the head means "yes," while shaking the head means "no." In India, however, there is another gesture, often referred to as the Indian head wobble, which consists of bobbing the head from side to side. This gesture can mean yes or no, and is intentionally ambiguous, often meant solely as an acknowledgement of what is being said, or its interpretation being left up to the other party to oblige them or to avoid coming across as impolite. As a guest, one does not want to be an imposition on one's host by giving a definitive yes in response to an offer that may have just been a courtesy. However, giving a definitive no may come across as rude or ungrateful of the hospitality extended to you as a guest. Thus, the purpose of the head wobble is to oblige the host to decide by leaving the interpretation open to meaning "yes, I am happy to do this" but also "no, it is okay if we do not."[1]

[1] Example provided by Fahad Malik, Corps Solutions, a contracted regional analyst at CAOCL who consulted the following source during development: Presh Talwalker, "The Indian Head Wobble as Strategic Move," *Mind Your Decisions* (blog), 21 September 2010.

to judge you without some help."[9] How you employ the skill depends on your specific situation. When interacting with those who prefer direct communication (for example, individualistic, low-context communicators), you may want to take a more direct approach by asking for clarification from your counterpart. Direct perception-checking involves three parts:

- a description of the behavior you noticed
- a statement about how you interpreted the behavior
- a request for clarification about how to interpret the behavior

It would look something like this: after a discussion with an Indian colleague, you might say, "When you bobbed your head back and forth while I was talking [described behavior], I wasn't sure whether you were

[9] J. Dan Rothwell, *In the Company of Others: An Introduction to Communication*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 60.

agreeing with me [first interpretation], disagreeing with me [second interpretation], or just confused [third interpretation]. Can you explain what the head bob means [request for clarification]?"

For those who employ more indirect communication, such direct questioning of them may not provide you the clarification you seek. There are other perception-checking methods you can employ, such as practicing culture-sensitive paraphrasing skills. The paraphrasing skill has two major characteristics: 1) verbally restating the content meaning of the speaker's message in your own words and 2) nonverbally echoing back your interpretation of the emotional meaning of the speaker's message. The verbal restatement should reflect your tentative understanding of the speaker's meaning behind the content message, using phrases such as "It sounds to me that . . ." and "In other words, you're saying that . . ." Nonverbally, you should pay attention to the attitudinal tone that underlies your verbal restatement (that is, it is critical to display a genuine tone of the desire to understand). You will want to structure your statements according to your specific situation. Some guidelines: high-context communicators may respond better to deferential, qualifying phrases such as "I may be wrong, but what I'm hearing is that . . ." or "Please correct me if I misinterpret what you've said." For low-context communicators, your paraphrasing statements can be more direct and to the point. Again, what method you choose is up to you and the specific situation and counterpart.

Skill 3: Practicing Active Listening

The average person suffers from 3 delusions:
That he is a good driver
That he has a good sense of humor
That he is a good listener[10]

[10] Steven B. Sample, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 21.

People in all cultures use a variety of methods to indicate to a speaker that they are listening, including nonverbal behaviors (eye contact), paralanguage (silence), or verbalizations ("uh-huh"). It goes without saying that listener behavior and feedback styles vary widely across cultures. For example, while it is common to hear a mother in the United States saying to her child, "Show me some respect, and look at me when I'm talking to you," a Korean parent is more likely to say, "Show me some respect, and don't look at me when I'm talking to you." In some southern European cultures, if you were nodding your head to indicate that you were following along, you would actually be telling them "no!" Listening feels like a no-brainer activity, however, these cues and signs are not universal, and you must be mindful of cultural as well as individual differences.

Military personnel encounter a broad range of situations in which listening skills are key, and different situations call for different listening behaviors. Your work life, home life, social life, etc. all require different kinds of listening behaviors. Recall from chapter one that communication competence happens in context; this includes listening. What makes you a competent listener in one situation (the lecture hall) will not necessarily make you a competent listener in another (talking with your spouse), hence the importance of keeping the context in mind as you prepare for the listening situation.

So what is effective listening? Examining how the Chinese approach listening can provide great insight into the intricacies of effective listening. The Chinese word for listening, *ting*, is defined as "attending closely with our 'ears, eyes, and a focused heart'."[11] It means paying attention to all the sources of information the speaker gives. This is a reminder that people communicate not only with words but also with their facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, and shared cultural knowledge. To understand someone fully, you must listen to the spoken and to the unspoken.

[11] Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 220.

One technique is to practice active listening. Active listening is a structured communication technique that helps improve the way we listen and respond to others. As opposed to simply hearing, active listening implies that we are making a conscious effort to understand, interpret, and evaluate what we hear. Active listening entails 1) focusing all attention on the speaker, 2) suspending judgment, and 3) summarizing/clarifying what the speaker says.

Employing these four behaviors can help you to become an active listener:

- **Prepare to listen.** Have you ever noticed that you tend to lose focus more when people are talking about something you are unfamiliar with, using words you do not know, possibly in a difficult accent? Active listening takes energy and involvement. Preparing yourself by researching and building vocabulary and knowledge of relevant acronyms, pronunciation, or communication styles will help you tune in.
- **Adjust to the situation.** All listening situations are different, so be mindful of the variables that affect listening, such as rest, hunger, comfort, location, etc.
- **Accept responsibility for understanding.** People become good listeners by accepting responsibility to understand the message and taking an active approach to ensure understanding. Recall the techniques described under "Skill 2: Interaction Management." These will help you ensure that you understand the message as the sender intends it.
- **Avoid listening barriers.** Several behaviors impede effective listening and impair dialogue, and the majority involve thinking (or vocalizing what you are thinking) while someone else is talking. Whether spoken or internal, dreaming, judging, playing devil's advocate, or advising someone—instead of listening to them while

they are speaking—all block your ability to receive their message or respond effectively.

Another technique is being aware of the diversity in feedback mechanisms people use to demonstrate they are listening. Feedback styles are culture-specific and can be very disruptive or confusing for those unfamiliar with the culture. Oftentimes, they are misinterpreted as disrespectful instead of as a demonstration of attentive listening. How do you show your speaker you are listening? Do you vocalize? Nod your head? Lean in? Touch the speaker? Look at the speaker, look away? Each participant in the interaction will have a preference based on cultural and situational influences. Consider the Japanese listening feedback style, *aizuchi*.

Aizuchi involves the listener using frequent verbal acknowledgments to let the speaker know the listener is involved in the conversation. *Aizuchi* is often perceived as a constant stream of words and sounds with a variety of meanings all meant to signal to speakers that they have the listener's attention. In Japan, this type of listener feedback is customary, even necessary, to show the appropriate amount of involvement in a conversation. For those unaccustomed to this, it can be a very surprising, confusing behavior. Without an understanding of this Japanese cultural feedback preference, it would be easy to assume a Japanese counterpart is being rude or even disrespectful.

Skill 4: Managing Paralanguage Use and Perception

If you have ever listened to a conversation between people speaking a foreign language and had no idea what they were saying but had a good sense of whether they were happy, upset, or shocked, then you already understand the importance of paralanguage. Paralanguage is everything you do with your voice when communicating, aside from using words. Paralanguage focuses not on what you say but on how you say

it. No matter where you are in the world and no matter which language you speak, it is impossible to communicate verbally without using paralanguage.

Looking at it through a cross-cultural lens, we know that paralanguage influences the way we perceive others and are perceived by them. In a study of impressions based on voices of people from the United States and Korea, researchers found that speaking quickly conveys power and competence to people in the United States but not to Koreans, who believe that faster speech conveys youthfulness and immaturity.[12] This illustrates the point that, when it comes to paralanguage, what works in one culture will not necessarily work in another.

There is a great deal of cross-cultural variation in vocal qualities, such as

- volume—loud to soft
- pitch—high to low
- pitch intensity—emotional or unemotional
- rate of speech—fast to slow
- articulation—precise to imprecise

Sarcasm, for instance, is conveyed entirely through tone of voice, and comedians often find that sarcasm does not cross cultures well because of the cultural variability of paralanguage. We also know that different aspects of paralanguage can alter and even contradict the meaning of a message. Consider the role of the voice in lie detection. Studies routinely acknowledge the importance of volume, intonation, pitch, and tempo in distinguishing truth from deception.[13] Research connecting tone of

[12] Ying Peng, Leslie A. Zebrowitz, and Hoon Koo Lee, "The Impact of Cultural Background and Cross-Cultural Experience on Impressions of American and Korean Male Speakers," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 24, no. 2 (June 1993): 214–15, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022193242005.

[13] Judee K. Burgoon et al., *Detecting Deception in the Military Infosphere: Improving and Integrating Human Detection Capabilities with Automated Tools* (Arlington, VA: Air Force Office of Strategic Research, 2007).

voice with medical malpractice suits indicates that "the manner or tone in which a physician communicates might be as important to malpractice as what is said."[14] Specifically, researchers have found that surgeons who were perceived to have a "dominant tone" were more likely to be sued than those who sounded less dominant. The study's findings remind us of the ways in which respect is communicated through tone of voice.

Obviously, the possibility exists for cultural differences in paralinguistic cues to cause misunderstanding. For example, when native speakers of Arabic are asking questions, they can sound aggressive and possibly threatening to native English speakers' ears simply due to the fact that Arabic speakers use a higher pitch range.[15] Everyone perceives and evaluates paralanguage based on their own cultural background. According to Communication Accommodation Theory, we tend to view people who sound like us as more friendly and attractive and people who sound different as strange and/or distant. This is exemplified in the following situation that occurred at a British airport: Newly hired Indian and Pakistani cafeteria employees were viewed as "surly and uncooperative" by both customers and their supervisors. The reason was due to the intonation used when asking customers if they wanted gravy on their meals. While the employees said "gravy" using falling intonation, the British customers expected rising intonation. The British customers interpreted the employees' "gravy" as "this is gravy, take it or leave it," not as a polite request, which is what the employees intended. Both sides left this encounter feeling frustrated because of the different cultural backgrounds that brought entirely different sets of assumptions to the same communicative event.[16]

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[14] Nalini Ambady et al., "Surgeons' Tone of Voice: A Clue to Malpractice History," *Surgery* 132, no. 1 (July 2002): 5–6, https://doi.org/10.1067/msy.2002.124733.

[15] Ellen Feghali, "Arab Cultural Communication Patterns," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 21, no. 3 (1997): 368–69, https://doi.org/10.1016/S0147-1767(97)00005-9.

[16] John J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 173–74, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511611834.

In this situation, the new cafeteria employees could have lost their jobs simply based on the fact that the way they ask a question differed from what the customers expected to hear. If you think about it, how do you know someone is asking a question (verbally) if you cannot see the question mark at the end of it? For the most part, we rely on intonation (rising, for example) to let us know that we are being asked a question. As the story above reminds us, however, the way this is done in conversation will vary across cultures. Communicators, armed with the knowledge that paralanguage can have varying meanings, are able to thoughtfully evaluate cross-cultural messages and seek additional information before jumping to conclusions about intended meanings.

Skill 5: Decoding Nonverbal Messages

The car rapidly approached the checkpoint. The Soldier signaled the driver to slow down by pumping his hands palms down, arms outstretched toward the ground, but the driver failed to respond. The Soldier then signaled the driver to stop by holding his arms out and his palms up towards the driver; again there was no response. The Soldier then fired warning shots in front of the oncoming car, but the driver merely swerved away from where the bullets impacted and sped up. Interpreting this action as hostile, the Soldier then fired at the driver, killing him. Surviving occupants of the car said they were only trying to get away from a hazardous area. When questioned on why they did not slow down or stop, they said that they did not know what the hand signals meant and that they thought the first shots fired were intended

> *to hit them but missed. To an Iraqi, the hand signal for "slow down" is to clasp all four fingers together with the thumb over them, palm up and extend your arm with the back of the hand toward the driver.*[17]

Although not all nonverbal communication misunderstandings have such tragic consequences, this example reminds us never to assume we can predict the message intended by cross-cultural nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication, compared with verbal communication, often has a greater impact on receivers, and yet, it is a subject on which very few of us have received much training or education.[18] The interpretation of nonverbal messages varies from culture to culture. Unlike the rules for verbal communication, the rules for nonverbal communication are generally unwritten, making accurate interpretation very difficult. Specific study of nonverbal communication makes us more aware of the ways we communicate very loud messages without even opening our mouths.

An interesting research example is a study where prison inmates provide "muggability" ratings for videotaped pedestrians and identify which pedestrians have "the look of a victim." The researchers found that those with the look were communicating similar messages nonverbally.

> Their strides were either very long or very short; they moved awkwardly, raising their left legs with their left arms (instead of alternating them); on each step they tended to lift their whole foot up and then place it down (less muggable people took steps in which their feet

[17] Edwin B. Nelson, "Cultural Awareness: Resources Can Help Prepare Soldiers Before Deployments," *Infantry Magazine*, January/February 2007, 6.

[18] Howard Giles and Beth Le Poire, "Introduction: The Ubiquity and Social Meaningfulness of Nonverbal Communication," in *The SAGE Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Valerie Manusov and Miles L. Patterson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), xv–xxvii.

Personal Space

Turkish norms of personal space are not very different from the ones in the United States. However, Turkish sellers in small shops, stores, and restaurants tend to invade personal space, aggressively advertising their products and services, including physically directing potential clients to their place of business. Local residents, who know how to avoid this experience, and tourists who seem amused by this practice, do not seem to mind these sales tactics. For those unfamiliar with the practice, however, those tactics can seem intrusive and aggressive. In June 2017, Tokyo police detained two Turkish employees of a kebab shop after locals filed a total of 27 complaints over their alleged aggressive approach to passersby in front of their kebab shop. According to complaints, they "grabbed the arms of potential customers and blocked their paths while boasting of the deliciousness of their kebabs." The Turkish employees responded "that they were not ill-willed and approached potential customers with courtesy."[1]

[1] "Tokyo Police Detain Two Turkish Kebab Shop Employees over Aggressive Touting," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 26 June 2017.

> rocked from heel to toe). Overall, the people rated most muggable walked as if they were in conflict with themselves; they seemed to make each move in the most difficult way possible.[19]

In short, these inmates indicated that they chose who to mug on the street just by observing a person's nonverbal behavior.

Although it is often used interchangeably in popular culture with *body language*, nonverbal communication is much more than that. It also includes the ways in which people use space, time, dress, smell, and touch to communicate. There are many types of nonverbal communication; we are going to discuss four:

[19] Loretta Malandro and Larry Barker, *Introduction to Nonverbal Communication* (Ann Arbor, MI: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1982), 112–13.

1. Haptics (how touch is used to communicate)
2. Proxemics (how space is used to communicate)
3. Chronemics (how time is used to communicate)
4. Kinesics (how bodies are used to communicate)

People use touch to communicate feelings and emotions, both positive and negative. It can convey physical intimacy or absolute rejection. What constitutes acceptable ways to communicate through touch and the interpretation of meaning are both determined culturally and vary across and within cultures. For example, displays of physical intimacy, such as kissing, in some cultures are reserved for the private sphere, as such behavior in public conveys certain messages about the character of those involved, especially the women. Columbia Pictures learned this lesson the hard way in Egypt. Its 1983 production, *Sadat*, showed the Egyptian president publicly kissing his wife. Such touching is an unacceptable public act in Egypt. This demonstrated a lack of understanding of how and when Egyptians use touch to convey physical intimacy. This in combination with politics and several other controversies in the film led the Egyptian government to ban Columbia Pictures from Egypt.[20]

Haptics (the use of touch) is closely associated with proxemics (the way we use space) and cannot be fully understood without taking proxemics into consideration. Because we all have needs for both privacy (distance) and interdependence (nearness), one way we manage this tension is by defining and defending a territory. Decades of work devoted to nonverbal communication by Edward Hall revealed four kinds of distance observed among U.S. adults: intimate distance (contact to 18 inches), personal distance (1.5–4 feet), social distance (4–12 feet), and public distance (12–25 feet).[21] Although the limits of each zone are certainly varied, such distances exist in many cultures. Of course, what you con-

[20] Judith Miller, "Upset by 'Sadat,' Egypt Bars Columbia Films," *New York Times*, 2 February 1984, C17.
[21] Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 116–25.

sider to be an appropriate amount of space between you and a stranger on an empty beach (you probably do not want that stranger right next to you) might be completely different for someone from a different culture. Likewise, there is cultural variation in who is allowed or expected in the various zones. In Iraq, for instance, contact inside one's intimate zone (contact to 18 inches) is common among friends and associates. Being within this zone with someone of the same gender is a sign of admiration, not homosexuality, and is expected once rapport is established between two people.

Beyond touch and space, the use of chronemics (how people perceive the use of time and how they structure time in their relationships) is another important form of nonverbal communication that differs substantially across cultures. Despite the significant differences in the way people around the world look at time, there is one thing to keep in mind: time is the only resource distributed equally to everyone. We all do not have clean air or adequate drinking water, but every person on this earth is given 24 hours a day. There are dozens of examples which illustrate how different cultures use those 24 hours. For example, some cultures view time, but not the clock, as important. As a result, schedules are flexible and are secondary to relationships. The following example of differences in time orientation is taken from an article by psychologist Dr. Helen Klein, who studied the impact of intercultural interactions on civil aviation.

> For American aviation personnel, keeping aircraft safely in the air and on schedule is a high priority. For them, maintenance personnel must be ready to support this goal. In China, workmen will stop to socialize or have lunch instead of doing a needed repair. An American field service representative interpreted this behavior as showing that the workers do not understand the

> big picture of what the task implies. For those workers, maintenance can wait, but relationships with people cannot be postponed.[22]

The fourth category of nonverbal communication is kinesics. The technical term for the study of movement and gesture, kinesics comes from the Greek word for *motion* and includes gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and eye behavior. Even for one of the most common human expressions such as affirmation (saying yes), there is cross-cultural variety in the ways in which it is expressed nonverbally.

- In the United States, it is nodding.
- In Ethiopia, it is throwing one's head back.
- In Malaysia, it is thrusting the head sharply forward.
- For a Borneo tribe, it is simply raising an eyebrow.[23]

It bears repeating that you can never assume that a different culture will associate the same meaning you do to any particular gesture. Understanding variation in nonverbal communication is an important step in the development of cross-cultural competence. First impressions can set the tone for the entire duration of a relationship, so becoming familiar with greeting rituals across cultures is a good start. As you become more skilled in decoding nonverbal cues, you will become more keenly aware of the ways in which nonverbal communication can define a message, regulate a message, or be the message.[24] Remember: all nonverbal behavior communicates a message. Although you can never truly control

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[22] Helen A. Klein, Gary Klein, and R. J. Mumaw, *Culture-Sensitive Aviation Demands: Links to Cultural Dimensions*, Technical Report, Boeing Company under General Consultant Agreement 6-1111-10A-0112 (Fairborn, OH: Wright State University, 2001), 15.

[23] Larry A. Samovar, Richard E. Porter, and Edwin R. McDaniel, *Communication Between Cultures*, 7th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth, 2010), 248.

[24] David Matsumoto, Mark G. Frank, and Hyi Sung Hwang, eds., *Nonverbal Communication: Science and Applications* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2013), https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452244037.

how others interpret your actions, learning about cross-cultural variability in nonverbal communication familiarizes you with the patterns that have the potential to build up a relationship or break it down.

Preparing for Interaction

The five intercultural communication skills discussed above can serve as a toolkit designed to help you prepare for and behave during intercultural interactions. They have equipped you with a variety of explanations for the causes of misunderstanding during interactions and strategies to work through them, thereby increasing your communication resourcefulness. Such resourcefulness is very useful when trying to make sense of unexpected or confusing behavior. As you prepare for an interaction, it is important to take a moment to consider the following questions:

1. **Are my interaction skills ready?** Have I thought about how I will reduce uncertainty in the conversation and get more information if I need it?
2. **How might paralanguage come into play?** Could volume, tone of voice, or rate of speech impact the way I perceive this person or the way they perceive me?
3. **What kind of nonverbal messages might be problematic?** Do we use touch, space, time, and body movements to communicate in the same way?
4. **What is my own communication style?** If it is direct and task-oriented, how might that shape the course of a conversation?
5. **How will I show my counterparts that I am listening?** Can I expect that they might use different active listening techniques?

These questions can build on one another to increase the chances that your interaction will have a desirable outcome (effectiveness) and not offend anyone or damage the relationship (appropriateness). Employing

Cultural Repair: It Takes Time

Addressing mistakes immediately when they happen helps inform those affected that you are aware of what you have done. It is important to note, however, that repairing the relationship is more than just offering an apology; it involves rebuilding the lost trust and requires time. Harsh words are like nails in a board: when removed, holes still remain. This allegory shows that through this experience the board has changed; so do relationships when impacted by misunderstanding, carelessness, or frustration. Note the experience recounted by a Marine gunnery sergeant on a training mission in the United Arab Emirates:

> When we had a problem—we offended one of them once you know, [one of our guys] when he said . . . "[expletive removed] inshallah" . . . how do you repair that right in front of all the soldiers and it was [our Marine] literally going up there and eating his ego, and saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I apologize." And he would apologize, and we were really good friends with that soldier, so he knew he didn't really mean it, and they are all American culture based, so they understood. So we fixed it, but yet, even after that it was a wall for a little bit. They didn't really want to hang out with us for a while, the soldiers just kind of backed off for a while.[1]

[1] Interview with gunnery sergeant no. 15, 21 September 2016, Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning's Longitudinal Program Assessment Project, under USMC IRB Protocol USMC.2016.0005.

these skills during the interaction reduces the likelihood of the kinds of negative reactions that often lead to unnecessary conflict and undermine mission accomplishment.

When Things Go Wrong: Trouble Recovery

When mistakes are made—and they will be—it is very important first to recognize what has happened and then address the issue right away. This is referred to as *trouble recovery*. Problems may arise from minor issues with speaking, hearing, or understanding, using an incorrect ges-

ture, or getting someone's name wrong. They may also arise from more major issues, such as entering someone's home without permission or using excessive force. Whatever the case, it is usually more effective if the person who is responsible for the trouble addresses it explicitly and as soon as possible. For example, during an interaction you might become distracted by having to take notes and ask questions at the same time and so find it hard to maintain eye contact. If this happens, apologize. Then, either explain why you need to take notes during the interaction or find a scribe to take notes. Whatever you do, it is generally best not to try to minimize or avoid the situation. If you want to build rapport and achieve your goals in the interaction, it is important to show respect for your counterparts, to look at things from their perspective, and to make the situation right. Of course, depending on the cultural context, your counterparts may not share your approach to trouble recovery. They may prefer to save face by pretending a problem did not happen or address issues later in another setting, especially if they have caused the issue. That is okay, too. It requires flexibility and adaptability on your part.

POCESAD[25]

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) set up a research program to determine how to improve military personnel's interaction skills, especially in situations with little or evolving local information. One of the outcomes of that research was a checklist of sorts that details seven steps of the interaction process. The steps outlined below may help you visualize how the concepts and skills discussed up to this point intersect with and support intercultural interactions. Also, as it was designed for military audiences, you may encounter it in future

[25] Derived from observational notes made by a CAOCL researcher observing Tactical Social Interaction (TSI) training, SOI West, 13–17 January 2014, sponsored by the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (WSCJTC) as part of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) funded Strategic Social Interaction Modules (SSIM) Program.

training. The seven steps are: plan, observe, contact, engage, maintain self-control, adapt, and disengage (POCESAD).

Step 1: Plan. Just as if you were going in front of a meritorious board or on a first date, plan out the interaction ahead of time. Even if you only have a few minutes, think about who you expect to talk to, anything you already know about them (cultural concepts), how you wish to present yourself (maintaining tact and bearing), what you hope to achieve, how you think they will respond to you (perspective-taking), and any obstacles you might encounter. Include the questions from the section above on preparing for an interaction. If possible, come up with a plan that has several alternatives depending on what actually ensues. And even if the interaction unfolds differently than you expect, just having thought it through should put you one step ahead of the game.

Step 2: Observe. Use the active observation skills described earlier to look closely at the situation and, if possible, the person/people with whom you intend to interact. Observe body language; how people use gestures, eye contact, and body positioning; and the other nonverbal messages they may be conveying through positioning, clothing, use of touch and time, etc. Think about whether it would be appropriate to mirror this. Assess the mood. If necessary, make adjustments to your plan.

Step 3: Contact. This is where you first make contact with the individual or group and begin your actual interaction. Having done your prep work, you should be well positioned culturally to greet your counterparts and adjust as necessary to set the interaction on the right footing. Remember, cultural variability may require you to adjust your strategies. And of course, in some cases, you will be operating absent any specific information, which is okay, because you understand the fundamentals of human behavior and have the skills to navigate such culturally complex situations. It is in this initial stage where, when appropriate, you explain the purpose of the interaction.

Step 4: Engage. Remember at the end of your interaction you want

not only to have achieved your goal but also to have built enough rapport so that you or the next person in your billet can come back another time. Therefore, think carefully before jumping into the primary reason for your interaction. Leverage your understanding of human behavior and the techniques to build rapport and communicate interculturally. The expected pattern of conversation may be something you can find out ahead of time through research or observation, or you may just have to feel your way through. Either way, it is better to err on the side of caution and move more slowly rather than jump right in. It is also helpful to try to frame your interaction appropriately and intentionally. What this means is that you need to be aware of what you are trying to achieve and how you are doing it. For example, are you using the language and tone (paralinguistics) of asking or offering help or are you actually giving a lecture or making a joke? It is important to be self-aware and to assess continually how you are coming across, whether you are making progress, and whether you need to shift your approach to move the interaction along in a positive way.

Step 5: Maintain self-control. Suspend judgment and maintain tact and bearing. Try hard to control your emotions. Pay attention to your body language and how you are presenting yourself. Notice how you are being read by your counterpart(s) and adapt as necessary. Above all, remember that your end goal is to achieve the overarching purpose of your interaction. Regardless of how frustrating the interaction may become, do not compromise your self-control.

Step 6: Adapt. All interactions are dynamic. Therefore, you will have most success if you adapt as you go along. Employing the myriad skills discussed above will help you determine how best to act. When mistakes are made, acknowledge them and enter into trouble recovery mode. If your counterparts do not share your suggested method, adapt and move forward to your goal.

Step 7: Disengage. This is one of the more important stages and is

often overlooked or minimized. How you part sets the tone for the next encounter. At the end of the interaction, try to use appropriate expressions of gratitude or farewell and do not make any promises you cannot keep. Regardless of whether you have met your overarching goals, a positive departure will improve your chances in the next round of interactions.

DARPA has developed this relatively easy process to help you think intentionally through the steps of an interaction. Will each interaction follow these steps linearly? No, of course not. The steps serve as a guide, a tool that you can use to practice, so that eventually this type of thinking and behavior is routine for you.

Building Rapport

Discussion

One of the key outcomes desired as a result of the appropriate and effective application of intercultural communication skills is the ability to build rapport. Rapport is defined generally as the relative harmony and smoothness of relations between people and is often mentioned as a critical step in gaining trust and cooperation in intercultural interactions. Researchers who conducted extensive interviews devoted to the characteristics of strategic leadership with four dozen senior military officers ranging from colonels to four-star generals found "the ability to communicate across cultural divides" to be critical for mission and career success. Further, several senior officers were quoted in the study as saying, "This is a people business. Success comes from relationships."[26] But how is this done? Building rapport goes beyond being friendly and does not emerge automatically from two people talking. It is a culture general skill that you can sharpen by attending to certain considerations, such as face concerns, nonverbal expressions of rapport, and managing identity threats.

[26] Barak A. Salmoni et al., "Growing Strategic Leaders for Future Conflict," *Parameters* Spring (2010): 74, https://doi.org/10.55540/0031-1723.2514.

Key Points

Face

The term *face* is an identity resource that is manifested and comanaged in our communication with others.[27] Face is, simply speaking, your image in the eyes of others—or others' credibility in your eyes. There are two aspects of face:

- *Self-face* means your honor or respect in the eyes of someone else.
- *Other-face* means honor or respect toward someone else as judged by you.

Think of one of the most embarrassing moments of your life. Was it so embarrassing because of what you did or because of who was there to witness it? If the latter, you understand why saving face is so important. Because face is public, it is defined by our social interaction. It is based on others' perceptions and judgments of a person's moral conduct, position, status, and/or reputation. If we need to boil down face to a single word, it means "honor." The opposite of face is humiliation or shame. If a person loses face, he or she feels humiliated or ashamed because of the judgments of others. If an entire group loses face, group humiliation or group shame occurs. Face is dynamic. You can gain it or lose it. You can help someone else gain it or lose it.

There is considerable variation across cultures regarding what constitutes face and what will cause one to lose it. Losing face, or causing someone else's loss of face, is one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of positive cross-cultural relations around the world. In cultures where honor and others' perceptions of you are fundamental to life, such as in collectivist, high-context cultures, losing face can carry a much higher social cost than in individualist, low-context cultures, such as many cultures within the United States and across Europe. Therefore,

[27] Stella Ting-Toomey, *Communicating across Cultures* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 38.

Saving Face

Erving Goffman invokes this metaphor for the study of face-saving: "[it] is to study the traffic rules of a social interaction; one learns about the code the person adheres to in his movement across the paths and designs of others, but not where he is going, or why he wants to get there."[1] A U.S. government worker in Afghanistan was surprised by the "traffic rules of interaction" when they had to decide how to navigate a delicate situation between their interpreter and the commanding officer of the Afghan police. The situation started with a miscommunication between the U.S. worker and the interpreter. The U.S. worker purchased some Korans as gifts in Egypt to bring to some important Afghans. The interpreter, a Muslim, carried the Korans and handed them to the Afghan recipient when cued to do so by the U.S. worker. There was one Koran left. The U.S. worker intended to give it to an Afghan friend, but the interpreter thought it was meant for the commanding officer and gave it to him while the U.S. worker was busy. When the U.S. worker figured out the miscommunication, they felt it would be possible to explain the mix-up. But the interpreter was emphatic; one cannot ungive a gift, especially a Koran. The U.S. worker had a few options. One was to let the Koran stay where it was, which would save the face of the interpreter and the commanding officer. The other option was to, in effect, save face because it was their intention to deliver the Koran to a very respected Afghan, whom the commanding officer also knew. It was difficult for the U.S. worker to accept that this mistake could not be corrected. On the other hand, face is such that, once it is lost, it is even more difficult to correct. What decision would you make in this situation?[2]

[1] Erving Goffman, "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction," *Psychiatry* 18, no. 3 (1955): 216, https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1955.11023008.

[2] Vignette drawn from personal experience in 2010 of a contributing author who wished to remain anonymous.

it is important to consider, for example, when working through a conflict or negotiating with someone from a culture where face plays a large role in social interaction, how you can shape your behavior and communications so that you do not compromise the face of your counterpart unintentionally so that you ensure the outcome you need.

Revisiting Perspective-taking, Suspending Judgment, and Self-regulation

Fundamental to rapport-building are the three skills discussed above: perspective-taking, suspending judgment, and self-regulation. These skills help you avoid stereotyping, particularly when your initial interpretation proves inaccurate, and move beyond your first impressions or prejudgments to take a fresh approach. For example, suppose that in the United States we believe that fatalism is an unrealistic, counterproductive superstition that impedes prosperity and modernization. Of course, this attitude could prove problematic when interacting with people from a society that tends toward fatalism. By suspending your preconceived bias and controlling your response, you have the cognitive and emotional space to consider their perspective and seek to understand why certain people consider fatalism a realistic approach. Perhaps their beliefs have been influenced by a history of suffering economic and political hardships such as civil wars, genocide, lack of industrialization, and slavery, which have over time embedded fatalistic religious roots into their society. Maintaining an open-minded approach unclouded by your own interpretations of the world can help you first find understanding and then encourage you to modify your behavior and communication style during an intercultural interaction.

Processing an intercultural interaction can be difficult and confusing. When we encounter thinking and behaviors that are different from our own, it is natural for us to judge those according to our own standards. However, passing judgment does not help the process of building rapport; changing how we think about and approach intercultural relations can. Using these three skills can help, as can incorporating the following four tenets into our interactions.

- **Teachable attitude.** Having a teachable attitude means we have a "willingness to learn from others." When we are willing to learn

from others, it does not imply that we are going to permanently change our behaviors to match someone else's. It does mean keeping an open mind and not immediately discounting something or passing judgment just because it does not match our own ideas or beliefs.

- **Mutual legitimacy.** Believing in mutual legitimacy means believing that there can be more than one possible right way to do things or more than one right answer. The right way depends on whom you ask. A lighthearted example is the process of mowing a lawn: Is it better to mow horizontally or diagonally? In both cases the grass gets cut, but there are personal or even cultural preferences involved when deciding just how to get it done.
- **Dialogue.** Dialogue is the process by which we interact with people and through which we learn about each other. To have successful dialogue, we must be genuine, include the perspectives of others, recognize the worth of other people, prioritize the interaction, view the cocommunicator as equal, and encourage a positive environment conducive to communication.
- **Considering context.** Just as with anything else, context matters. It is an important factor to attend to during intercultural interaction. Misperceptions and disagreements can often be avoided if the context of the situation and the larger cultural context are taken into account.[28]

Nonverbal Expression of Rapport

You might have heard that when it comes to real estate, the key focus is "location, location, location." In dealing with other cultures, the focus

[28] Bradford J. Hall, *Among Cultures: The Challenge of Communication*, 2d ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2005), 348–49.

becomes "relationships, relationships, relationships."[29] Rapport not only is built through words but also is expressed and recognized nonverbally. Rapport has been described as a socially "optimal experience" characterized by smooth, harmonious, and enjoyable interaction.[30] Decades of research devoted to rapport-building in the United States asserts that rapport develops when mutual attentiveness, positivity, and coordination occur and are reciprocated in interaction.[31] Mutual attentiveness involves "the feeling of mutual interest and focus during interaction"; positivity is associated with feelings of "friendliness and warmth"; and coordination involves the "feeling of balance and harmony."[32] But what does that look like?

Chances are, even without being able to hear or understand the words being said in a conversation, you could detect the establishment of rapport by observing nonverbal behavior. Observing nonverbal communication exchanged between a couple at a restaurant or individuals during a greeting can tell you a great deal if you know what to look for. Even though you most likely did not use words like *positivity* and *coordination* as you were noticing what was happening nonverbally during these interactions, you were still able to make sense of the behavior if you were in tune with the facial expressions, eye behavior, body language, and spatial distance between the people interacting. You were likely framing these behaviors and using them as a map to provide cues about how to interpret the communication acts within this context. When you are familiar with the cultural context, it is easier to accurately interpret

[29] LtCol Richard A. McConnell, Maj Christopher L. Matson, and Capt Brent A. Clemmer, "The MiTT and Its 'Human Terrain'—Transitioning the Iraqi Army into the Lead," *Infantry* 96, no. 6 (November/December 2007): 8–9.

[30] Linda Tickle-Degnen, "Nonverbal Behavior and Its Functions in the Ecosystem of Rapport," in *The Sage Handbook of Nonverbal Communication*, eds. Valerie Manusov and Miles L. Patterson (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 392, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412976152.

[31] Linda Tickle-Degnen and Robert Rosenthal, "The Nature of Rapport and Its Nonverbal Correlates," *Psychological Inquiry* 1, no. 4 (1990): 285–93.

[32] Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal, "The Nature of Rapport and Its Nonverbal Correlates," 286.

these acts. It becomes more complicated when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds.

It is important to keep in mind that the way in which rapport is expressed nonverbally is not universal. Each culture has a range of social norms and behaviors governing each of these three components. For example, mutual attentiveness includes mutual gaze, closer distance, and more direct body orientation. The appropriate use of space and eye contact will differ according to an individual's cultural background. The same behaviors that might work for you in the United States to build rapport, such as sustaining eye contact, can be perceived as threatening by others. Likewise, you can feel threatened or uncomfortable when someone stands too close to you when interacting. Such feelings can inhibit feelings of positivity, which impedes the development of rapport between counterparts. Similarly, positivity is characterized in conversation by smiling, touch, and mutual gaze (and you can probably guess how variation in what is considered appropriate would come into play with this one). Levels of comfort and appropriateness are dictated by the cultural norms of the groups present in the interaction, and oftentimes, they differ. Reaching the level of coordination—the behavioral balance of smooth responsiveness between conversational partners, which involves matching postures and gestures, mimicked expressions, and finely timed conversational turn-taking—takes time and a willingness to understand the cultural dynamics at play. Perspective-taking can facilitate this. Additionally, employing the skill of observation can help you obtain clues as to what is appropriate, and then, you can adjust your behavior as needed to achieve your goals.

Revisiting the Concept of Identity

A key consideration in the process of building rapport is the concept of identity. We covered identity earlier in chapter 2, however, identity—specifically the interplay between avowed and ascribed identity—plays a role in building rapport.

Avowed identity is how you choose to identify yourself. An avowed identity is one that you envision for yourself, both consciously and subconsciously. Your actions and behaviors define who you are and then communicate that identity to people with whom you are interacting. Sometimes, you choose deliberately to do certain things to create a particular identity for yourself, such as choosing to be a member of the U.S. military. An ascribed identity is an identity assigned to you by others. This could include, for example, some of the general qualities associated with being a Republican or a Democrat or with professions such as nursing or elementary education. Whether you agree with them or not, many people identify individuals aligned with these political parties or professions as having specific qualities and even of being a specific gender.

Because expectations vary so widely between individuals as well as different groups and cultures, people often experience having an ascribed identity that does not fit their avowed identity. This lack of congruence often depends on the individual with whom we are communicating. For example, some veterans may have similar ideas of what it means to have served and ascribe an identity to other veterans that aligns with their avowed identity. A conscientious objector, on the other hand, may ascribe an entirely different identity and meaning to behaviors associated with military service. The process of rapport-building can begin when the identities that are ascribed to an individual "appropriately and effectively" match those that are avowed by that person.[33] As it may be difficult to find that balance, it is important to put some thought into this when trying to build rapport with your counterparts. By emphasizing what you (as individuals) have in common—whether it is desires such as family security or shared identity as military professionals—and remembering collectively that identity is multifaceted and complex, you can work to

[33] Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas, "Cultural Identity: An Interpretive Perspective," in *Theories in Intercultural Communication: International and Intercultural Communication Annual*, vol. 12, eds. Young Yun Kim and William B. Gudykunst (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1988), 99–123, 101.

lessen the feelings of mistrust and prejudice (see research on managing identity threats) and work toward finding commonality between you.[34] Another way to find common ground is to ask questions about cooking, sports, or family or to inquire about the reasons behind a ritual you have observed, noting its similarity to something in your personal experience. This helps to lessen the divide between self and other, demonstrates attentiveness to other, and can lead to a growth in positivity between self and other—all of which are fundamental to rapport building.

Identifying and Managing Culture Shock

Discussion

As military professionals, you face a lot of stressors in your job. There is, of course, the stress of combat and trauma and the stress of often finding yourselves operating from rough facilities while under significant logistical constraints. There is the stress from spending long periods away from home and your families. One form of stress that you encounter frequently, but may not recognize, is the stress that comes from encountering people whose values and ways of doing things are different from your own. Psychologists and sociologists frequently refer to this stress as *culture shock*. Severe culture shock can result in lack of sleep, irritability, depression, a sense of helplessness, and a fear of losing control. Almost everyone will experience some form of culture shock when interacting with different cultures, no matter if you are a military professional, diplomat, humanitarian aid worker, or businessperson. If you are able to recognize and mitigate culture shock, you will be less likely to experience it in its most severe forms.

In both the military and scientific literature, you may find mention

[34] Walter G. Stephan and Cookie W. Stephan, "Cognition and Affect in Cross-Cultural Relation," in *Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication*, ed. William G. Gudykunst (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 111–26.

of either *culture stress* or *culture shock*. Most of the time, both terms mean the same thing: a person's emotional reaction to the ambiguities of interacting with people and living in environments that are different from what they are used to. Using the term culture shock avoids confusion with *post-traumatic stress*, as these are two very different types of stress.

Key Points

Causes of Culture Shock[35]

Culture shock is not a sign of mental weakness. It is a real, normal stress that all people encounter. Treating it as anything but that is counterproductive and actually perpetuates the negative impact it can have on the individual, the unit, and the larger community. Culture shock tends to result from three sorts of situations: value conflicts, uncertainty, and failure of other cultures to live up to your expectations. In all three situations, culture shock occurs when people from a culture different from your own do things differently from how you would. Boredom and questions about whether your actions are producing results that match your intentions or those of your command can make these stressors more difficult to manage. Keep in mind that you can experience culture shock—or reverse culture shock—on returning home, as well, as things may have changed or you may have grown accustomed to different values and routines.

Value Conflicts

Value conflicts provide the first source of culture shock. Enemies or foreign military partners might not play by the same rules of warfare that you do. For example, they might place little value on the rights of civilians or life itself, using disproportionate force, showing a reckless disregard

[35] For a more comprehensive overview and additional sources related to culture shock, see Kristin Post, "Making the Case for a Renewed Focus on Culture Shock for the U.S. Military," *Journal of Culture, Language, and International Security* 1, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 35–44.

for collateral damage, or even causing civilian casualties intentionally. Also, local soldiers and civilians may engage in drug use, practices that you regard as corrupt, such as bribery and nepotism, or other behaviors that conflict with your cultural norms. These all can and do cause an understandable amount of stress.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty provides a second source of culture shock, especially when it is related to the need to make high-stakes decisions. When you are already performing a difficult and stressful mission, possibly with enemies shooting at you, it can be nerve-wracking not to know what the people around you are doing or why, because they do not behave like you. For example, if people do not smile when meeting you, you may not be sure whether their cultural rules about smiling are different or whether they have hostile feelings toward you. Also, unfamiliar eating or communication habits can cause stress, as you may be uncertain about how to behave so as not to offend.

Unmet Expectations

Culture shock can also occur when people in other cultures do not live up to your expectations. It is important to remember that your expectations are shaped by what you think is right and appropriate and that others have expectations as well, shaped by their own sense of right and appropriateness. Military personnel often experience culture shock when working with foreign military partners. Foreign soldiers may have different standards for weapons handling and security, or they may show up late, display minimal marksmanship skills, or do things that you might regard as unprofessional. Local civilians also may act in surprising ways. For example, they may have different hygiene standards (for example, expectations of how food is to be prepared) or displays of respect (greeting expectations at meals). As another example, a local contractor may

do work that does not match the standards you would expect from a contractor in the United States.

Recognizing Culture Shock

Before you can deal with culture shock, you have to be able to recognize it. Look for signs that something is bothering you. You may not be aware of what it is, or you may not even be thinking consciously about it in the moment. The following are signs that you may be experiencing some form of stress, possibly culture shock:

- fatigue or insomnia
- anger, disgust, frustration, or other uncontrollable emotions
- fear and anxiety
- confusion or disorientation
- excessive worry or a sense of helplessness
- changes in your routine, including what and how much you eat or how much and how fast you talk
- others reacting to you differently
- changes in relationships

The bottom line is that you need to know yourself. Reactions to culture shock can occur in the presence of the people who—and in the situations that—are causing the stress, for example, a foreign military partner. However, culture shock can also manifest itself once you are away from the source of stress, such as when you get angry at a subordinate for no real reason. You may not even realize that you are acting differently. You, therefore, need to get regular feedback from other colleagues or your family or friends. Talk to people you can trust to tell you if there is a problem. Get feedback from a few different people because everyone may not see the same things or agree about whether you have changed.

Also, be aware of how your unit members are responding to the

same or similar situations. Are they experiencing some of the symptoms above? They, too, can be experiencing culture shock and need to recognize it in themselves. Being able to recognize the source of the stress is the first step to managing its impact on the individual, the unit, and the larger community.

Dealing with Culture Shock

Once you recognize culture shock in yourself, you can take steps to deal with it. Just as you have techniques for dealing with combat and operational stress, there are techniques to handle culture shock. These techniques will help you operate with it in the moment and in the long term. There is no one formula for managing stress, but it is something you can do; being unable to avoid getting angry simply is not true.

Even the most trivial kinds of events can cause culture shock when they cause you to question your assumptions and values. There are several things you can do that can help you face the challenges that culture shock poses to mission accomplishment. These recommendations are very similar to the Rules of the Road provided in chapter 1 and involve many of the skills just discussed.

Accept Things You Do Not Like

You may see things that you do not like. You do not have to accept that the beliefs and practices of a foreign culture are right, but you do have to accept that they exist. They may violate your values, and you may feel that they violate universal human values. You are allowed to feel this way, and feeling this way shows that you have a moral compass. In the short time that you will spend operating in a foreign culture, you will not be able to change the things that bother you. In these situations, getting angry at them for "making you" feel bad or frustrated will not achieve anything. You will have to put these issues aside to accomplish the mission. Practice letting go of things you cannot change.

Suspend Judgment, Maintain Tact and Bearing, Take Alternative Perspectives

To accept things you do not like and to move on requires you to suspend judgment, self-regulate, and look at things from different perspectives. Often, frustration mounts because of a failure to suspend judgment. You may jump to conclusions, based on your own cultural background, about people's values and behaviors that inform your thoughts and feelings. Suspending judgment is the first step to changing that internal dialogue. Through self-regulation, you create the space to explore alternative explanations. Take the time to try to understand why the people in a foreign culture do what they do—that is, take their perspective. While there will be some things you do not agree with, if you understand people's motives, you will likely find it easier to accept those things. The locals were not brought up the same way as you, but most of them are not bad people. As discussed earlier, honing these skills when working with cultures different from your own will improve your ability to manage the (sometimes difficult) situations associated with mission accomplishment. They will also help you manage your internal responses to and think differently about, or reframe, the stressful situations you may encounter.

Reframe Your Problems

Reframing your problems presents a different way of thinking about the situation at hand. Instead of seeing aspects of another culture as obstacles to your mission, see them as challenges that you must overcome. Change the internal conversation you are having with yourself about the situation. You can look at the people from a different culture as the pieces of a puzzle, a puzzle that moves as people change and make new decisions. Challenge yourself to solve the puzzle rather than let it worry or frustrate you.

Take Control

While you may have to accept some things in the culture that you do not like, you choose how you respond to them. By using the concepts and skills discussed in this guidebook, you can explore creative ways to respond to get the job done. These concepts and skills will help you identify the things you can change and control. Focus on those rather than worrying about the things you cannot change. When you concentrate on the things you can control, you are more likely to feel confident than helpless.

Relax

When things are bothering you, find activities that help you relax like physical training, sports, reading, a movie, or a conversation with a friend. Seek positive activities, not those that have a negative impact on your health and ability to accomplish the mission, such as junk food, alcohol, and drugs. When possible, consider including people from the local cultures, such as nongovernmental agency workers, the local population, or partner forces, in these activities. Periodic U.S. military personnel-only activities are acceptable, but keep in mind that groups who fully remove themselves from other cultures tend to experience even worse culture shock when they, once again, interact with them.

Talk

Talking out your responses to such stressors with trusted agents is helpful when dealing with culture shock. These conversations can help you to understand the other culture better and also why aspects of it bother you. They can also reassure you that you are not crazy because you think something is disturbing. During a mission, you may want to talk things out with unit members or one of your leaders. Outside of the mission, you may want to reach out to friends or to someone who can give you an objective perspective, such as a combat psychologist or someone else trained in counseling.

Working with an Interpreter

Discussion

The presence of an interpreter in interactions with foreign populations adds complexity. More often than not, your interactions as military pro-

Culture Shock and Partnering with Foreign Security Forces

Any combined partner exercise will likely involve cohabitation, possibly with partners who are armed. In Afghanistan and Iraq, there have been cases of insider attacks, causing U.S. military personnel to feel constantly vigilant around local security forces who, through ill will or accident, may hurt or kill U.S. forces. Take the example of one Marine lieutenant, who was in charge of a quick reaction force (QRF) on a patrol base in Afghanistan. The lieutenant was called to a scene on the patrol base (PB) late one night that appeared to cause culture shock, even though they were not directly involved.

That night, a Marine on the PB was taking the "wag bag" (system of disposing of human waste) to the burn pit near the watch tower, which was located close to an entry control point. The Marine heard a noise in the brush near the burn pit and shone the flashlight on a man. They asked in Dari what the man was doing. The person was an Afghan police officer who lived on the same PB. The police officer racked his weapon in the Marine's face. The lieutenant's QRF quickly arrived, and the situation was de-escalated. No one was hurt. Afterward, the Afghan said he thought he was racking his weapon in a fellow Afghan's face as a joke. And though it was the Afghan who put the Marine in danger, it was the Marine who was reprimanded by their chain of command for their involvement, according to the QRF lieutenant. This illustrates a clear conflict of values between the Marines, who constantly emphasize safe weapons handling, with the other forces who see poor muzzle discipline as funny and who might rack their weapon as a joke.

Furthermore, this story seems to be about a miscarriage of justice, in which the Marine was punished and the Afghan police officer was not. Without knowing more about the Afghan National Police, it is difficult to

(continued)

Culture Shock and Partnering with Foreign Security Forces (*continued*)

know what kinds of actions are punishable and in what ways. By comparison, the Marines have an extremely rigorous system of discipline and punishment that is likely unrivalled by most foreign militaries and U.S. civilian organizations.

In this example, we do not know if the Marine who was threatened by the Afghan police officer ever had feelings of culture shock. We know the QRF lieutenant had ongoing feelings of outrage, even after returning to the United States. Interestingly, culture shock is not only due to direct experience. It can also result from minor incidents, rumors, stories, and cumulative events.[1]

[1] Based on interview notes with a lieutenant, conducted 4 January 2012. This interview was part of the Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning's Longitudinal Study of Impact of Culture Training Products, deemed to be not human subjects research by an Institutional Review Board Applicability Review, dated 31 March 2011.

fessionals with foreign populations will involve the need for an interpreter. An interpreter is someone who takes oral messages in one language and transforms them into another language, maintaining the cultural nuances, tone, and intent of the original meaning (a translator does this with written text). While the presence of interpreters in an interaction typically adds value, there is the potential for increased uncertainty, conversational strain, and misunderstanding during the interaction without intentional planning and management of the interaction. In addition to the variation in values, languages, communication styles, and nonverbal preferences between you and your counterparts, you now have a third party in the mix with distinct values, views, and behaviors. Furthermore, you have to keep a variety of goals in mind, those that deal with the outcome of the interaction as well as those that support the interaction process. Thus, using an interpreter requires some additional thinking and preparatory work to maximize the potential for a positive interaction outcome.

Before you start working with an interpreter, it is critical to know your interpreter. Here are just a few considerations and questions you should consider. Is this interpreter: a native speaker? Fluent in English? Familiar with the military (U.S. or other)? Reliable? Loyal (and to whom)? Of a high or low social status? Skilled in areas outside of interpreting (for example, a former professor/doctor/merchant)? Familiar with your operational environment (refugee from the local area; if so, from how long ago)? Compatible (with you and with the population or counterparts)? Where is this interpreter from? An interpreter's cultural, personal, and professional background will shape their perceptions, their language proficiencies, and possibly their interpretations. Interpreters may be filling a standardized job description, but each one comes to the position with different capabilities, motivations for taking the job, commitment to the mission, expectations about treatment and safety, and concerns about doing the work. The more you know about your interpreter, the more effectively you will be able to work together and the more likely it is that you will be able to anticipate problems and opportunities and obtain the interaction outcome you are seeking.

When you first meet your interpreter, as with most initial meetings with someone you do not know and with whom you are going to work, you will want to take some time to build rapport and get to know each other. Asking about professional background and familiarity with your area of operations are good places to start. Depending on where you are, family (keeping in mind cultural taboos that may be relevant) and non-mission related topics, such as sports preferences or travel, also can be good to bring up.

To be a successful team, there needs to be a sense of mutual trust between the two of you. Continuing to build rapport through meal sharing and informal conversations and demonstrating willingness to take care of the interpreter (with necessary food, sleeping arrangements, equipment, and downtime or time off, as the mission allows) both go

a long way in establishing that trust. As with any relationship, trust often comes with genuine caring and interest in one another. You need to get to a level of trust where you both feel like you can come to the other when there is confusion or lack of understanding, even if that is during an interaction. Minimizing the potential for misunderstandings through planning and rehearsing prior to interactions helps. For instance, if you are teaching a rifle range class and your interpreter does not understand the term *marksmanship*, you will want to figure this out before you and the interpreter are standing in front of a hundred foreign soldiers, where saving face for both of you is now at risk.

Good interpreters are extremely valuable; most of them know this and take pride in their work. By showing your appreciation through your actions, your time, and your respect for their work, you are validating how valuable interpreters are. You are also building rapport and trust. All of this will enable a better relationship, which is likely to have a positive impact on your mission.

Key Points

Unique Considerations when Involving an Interpreter

Earlier, you learned about the POCESAD process. When using an interpreter, many of the same procedures apply. With or without an interpreter, the preplanning, planning, and disengaging steps are critical as are your observational skills, your ability to suspend judgment, and your ability to maintain tact and bearing. With interpreters, additional considerations apply and are discussed here.

Planning

You would not be the first person to ever have launched an exercise, patrol, or training only to suddenly realize that three people needed an interpreter for three different reasons. As you know, planning does not

take care of every contingency, but it is useful in anticipating friction. As you start your planning process, think about what is going on and who needs interpreters. In many situations, enlisted personnel and officers may be doing different activities, and both groups may need interpreters. Also, think about who or what the priority is. If you are hosting a gathering of officials, you may think it is important to place your only interpreter side-by-side with the officers. But perhaps you are better off putting the interpreter at the security checkpoint with the lance corporal, at least at the beginning, because the arriving dignitaries are not used to being frisked nor being subjected to it by a younger man, and as a result, these dignitaries may be offended, may hold up the security line, could delay the start of the meeting, or even derail the whole thing because of a perceived affront. These kinds of considerations require an understanding of the culture of your area of operations. Interpreters often can help with this if they are already available. Once you have established position and quantity, you can start planning for the interaction.

Planning Questions

Using the four Ws and *how*, here are some basic questions that can help you and your interpreter prepare for the interaction.

1. Who
    a. Who are you going to speak with? How many people?
    b. Are there any obvious areas of concern about your interpreter and the person/people you are engaging (differences/similarities in age, gender, ethnicity, historical perspective, rank, etc.)?
2. Where
    a. Are you going to be outside or inside?
    b. Does your interpreter have any suggestions for how to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere?
3. When
    a. What time of the day is your engagement?

So You're John Smith. Is Your Father Ed Smith of Decatur?

Foreign names can be particularly hard to hear, remember, spell, and pronounce. If you know who you are meeting, ask your interpreter to help you properly pronounce your counterparts' names. If you do not know their names prior to the meeting, ask your interpreter to bring some paper and a pen to write down names when introductions are made. This avoids back-and-forth transliteration, it should help your meeting start more smoothly, and it can be especially helpful if the language does not use the Latin alphabet (e.g., Russian, Georgian, Arabic, etc.). Your interpreter may not always know how to read and write, so ask. Also, keep in mind that people do not always introduce themselves first name/last name. For instance, in Chinese and Korean, the last name is usually said first. Others may introduce themselves with an honorific (e.g., Professor Bob, Governor Jones). Make sure you clarify with your interpreter, especially if you are still fairly new to an area.

Finally, in some places and in some religious and ethnic groups, certain names are very common, so you may end up meeting many John Smiths. Just as the global address list uses middle initials to distinguish between common first name/last name combinations in different branches of the military, people have different ways of distinguishing between common names in their communities. Ask your interpreter what question to ask. It may be that a location, ethnic group, or mother's or father's name will be useful in distinguishing this person from others in the area with the same name. Using a person's name accurately is not only polite, it may be also important for security purposes.

   b. Are there any daily routines or religious activities to consider?

4. What
   a. What are you going to discuss?
   b. Will this topic be difficult for any reason? Are there sensitive areas to be aware of or to avoid?
   c. Does your interpreter understand the words that are associated with this topic (acronyms, phrases, important concepts, etc.)?

5. How
    a. What type of engagement is this? Is this a meeting? A negotiation? Are you stopping your interlocutor(s) on the street?
    b. Are there appropriate greetings and rituals to know given your anticipated approach?

Rehearsing

Rehearsing lessens the opportunities for unnecessary mistakes and cultural missteps and heightens the opportunity for a smooth start to the interaction. Work with your interpreter to ensure that you have the proper pronunciation and the proper terms of address (for example, using *usted*, the formal *you* in Spanish) for initial greetings and introductory remarks. Also, ask the interpreter to help you practice physical greetings. If individuals in this culture expect you to kiss both cheeks as a respectful greeting, they may approach you in this way, and you should be prepared. If this gesture makes you uncomfortable, you might need to get over your discomfort prior to the engagement. Also, review any possible confusing or unknown terms of art or acronyms that may arise during the course of the interaction. You will want to make sure that your interpreter is familiar with military concepts enough to be able to explain them to your counterparts if necessary. While it is best to avoid acronyms, you will want to introduce your interpreter to those that may surface to avoid confusion during the interaction. Depending on the type of engagement and level of formality, you may need to also rehearse where you will enter and leave a room, who enters the room in what order, seating arrangements, presentation of food or drink, and other protocol, as each sends messages to those involved in the interaction. In addition to greetings, it helps if you know enough of the foreign language to know when certain points are being conveyed. If, for example, your bottom line in a contract negotiation is $5,000 and you know how to say that in Tagalog, then you will know when your interpreter is faithfully interpreting that part of the conversation to the Philippine contractor.

Contact and Engage

The key to execution is making sure you are perceived as the person giving and receiving the message despite the fact that the interpreter is the main conduit of the information. You need to manage the interaction. The culture general concepts and skills covered in this chapter can help you. Specifically, when using an interpreter, you need to be mindful of positioning, pacing and phrasing of your speech, and the nonverbal messages being sent from you, your interpreter, and your counterparts.

You need to be positioned in the role of the authority. Therefore, you need to consider how to place yourself and your interpreter in relation to your counterpart (whether an individual, an important individual in a group, or a group of equals) to create that message (remember proxemics). Make sure your interpreter can still be heard. Circumstances and your own preference will determine how this looks. For beginners, try putting the interpreter to your right and slightly behind you, so you do not make the mistake of talking to the interpreter instead of the person you are engaging. Ensure you address your counterpart directly. If culturally appropriate, maintain eye contact with your audience. It may be useful to glance at your interpreter every once in a while, but you do not want to appear as if you are having the conversation with your interpreter.

To help your interpreter, establish a steady pace and use simple words and short phrases. Break what you want to say into short phrases with pauses in between; however, do not pause so much that the interpreter does not understand the meaning of what you are saying. Remember sentence construction varies among languages, and your interpreter may need the complete sentence or your complete thought to be able to convey your meaning.

During your interaction, you need to listen both with your ears and eyes to the verbal and nonverbal messages being sent by both your interpreter and your counterparts. Watch for cues from your interpreter, such as the following:

- Is your interpreter showing you signs to slow down or speed up?
- Are your counterparts speaking too quickly or too long for the interpreter?
- Is your interpreter showing discomfort over something that you have just said?
- Is your interpreter showing signs of not hearing or understanding what you have said?
- Is your interpreter showing signs that you are being insulted?

Also, be mindful of the messages you are sending to ensure you are conveying what you intend. This will help you steer the conversation appropriately. You can use strategic pauses in the conversation to confer with your interpreter. Do this when you need to clarify, when you sense a loss of rapport, or when you need to plan your next step. Brief and infrequent interruptions will generally not be perceived as overly rude. All of this is a lot to do while you are also thinking of what to say and listening to what your counterpart is saying. It will take practice.

Debrief and Check for Understanding

It is always important to have a conversation with your interpreter after the engagement is finished. Sometimes, this will be a simple conversation, checking for your understanding and assessing the general demeanor of those involved in the interaction. If you were instructing, ask your interpreter how much the students seemed to understand what you were teaching. If you were talking to a civilian in a combat environment, you may want to check whether the interpreter felt the responses to your questions were reliable. When the engagement was confusing or went poorly, explain to your interpreter what you think went wrong, identify the confusing responses or reactions, and get the interpreter's opinion about why the response was not as expected. Perhaps the reason is cultural (for example, people here tell stories that indirectly answer

Table 1. Common mistakes

Common mistakes military personnel make	Common mistakes interpreters make
Looking at the interpreter and saying "tell them. . ."	Looking at the person next to you and saying "they said. . ."
Speaking too long before breaking	Not admitting when they do not know a word or phrase
Using acronyms and military terms	Over- or underinterpreting or inserting their own thoughts
Not remembering how much time it takes to interpret and planning for too much during the meeting/training period/etc.	Being helpful by having a side conversation to explain something but not explaining the conversation to you
Not planning and rehearsing the engagement with the interpreter	
Treating the interpreter like a military person	

questions) or perhaps you are stumbling over different meanings for the same word. There also may be power dynamics that your interpreter was not able to explain during your engagement.

The debrief is a good time to reinforce what you like about the interpreter's style and identify ways they could do better. Make sure you also ask the interpreter to let you know how you can improve. If necessary, take notes, so that you can benefit from lessons learned and have more successful future interactions.

Conclusion

The skills presented in this chapter of the guidebook serve to help you structure your thinking and behavior to maximize your effectiveness throughout your military career no matter your mission or operating en-

vironment. They are the fundamental skills that you use every day to navigate and influence the world around you, albeit mostly subconsciously, as they are so integrated into your thinking and behavior. This text aims to help you understand how you can consciously employ them to affect relational and mission outcomes. Whether you are an intelligence analyst, a foreign military advisor, or a small unit patrol leader, these skills help you build awareness of and shape your response to the information, people, and situations you encounter to obtain the outcome you need.

The culture general concepts and skills covered in the latter two chapters of the guidebook are tools, not magic bullets. You can still misinterpret or draw inaccurate conclusions about the information, behavior, and situations you encounter. In almost all intercultural interactions, inevitably somebody makes a mistake or unknowingly does something that upsets or angers the other people involved. In such cases, your understanding of human behavior, mastery of the skills described here, and the relationships you have developed may not prevent the incident, but they can help you work through it. Also, there will be times when you are not able to find a way to accomplish the mission without some disruption to local patterns. However, your ability to observe, accurately assess a situation, and build relationships makes it more likely that you will be able to

- carry out effective analysis that will have positive impacts on mission planning and execution;
- design policies, plans, and programs that will have the impact you need;
- be a more effective leader, both of your unit and out in the field;
- accurately assess when you are truly at an impasse rather than experiencing a cross-cultural challenge that can be worked through;
- preserve the goodwill and rapport you have established for when you really need it, in operations or to make essential changes, rather than depleting it by pushing for unnecessary changes; and

- design and implement changes in partnership with the people you encounter rather than imposing the changes yourself (which makes it more likely the changes will stay in place without your active involvement), make accurate assessments of the obstacles and opportunities in the situation, and choose the most effective course of action.